

December Garden Activities from Your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - Trees, shrubs, and perennials can still be planted or transplanted to a new location this month if the ground is not too frozen to work properly. Some trees and shrubs that will provide food for birds are dogwood, crabapple, holly, hawthorn, and pyracantha.

Continue raking leaves from your lawn and apply lime if your soil test indicates that it is needed. A hand-held shredder that acts like a vacuum is an alternative to raking. The shredded, bagged leaves can then be deposited in your garden.

If you have not already done so, mulch all trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs. A four to six-inch layer of mulch is good, placing the mulch close but not touching the stem or trunk of the plant.

Deciduous trees and shrubs can be pruned as needed when they are fully dormant.

Rake and dispose of fruit and leaves around fruit trees to help minimize overwintering insects and diseases.

If rain and snowfall are inadequate, water all new plantings and bulb beds.

Flower Beds - Cut chrysanthemums back to about two to three inches once blooming is complete.

To keep your pansies healthy and blooming, deadhead (remove faded blooms) and fertilize, following label directions.

Spring flowering bulbs can still be planted this month.

Clean up flowerbeds and remove annuals killed by frost. Work old mulch and organic matter into beds before the soil freezes.

Apply pre-emergent herbicides to control winter weeds.

Vegetables - Plan ahead. Order gardening catalogs and start planning your spring vegetable and flower gardens.

Prepare next year's garden soil by turning it over and incorporating organic materials such as pine bark, compost, or shredded leaves.

Pull any weeds that remain in your garden.

Cut any remaining tops off of asparagus plants and add a winter dressing of aged manure to the bed.

Houseplants - Do not over water houseplants during the winter months as this could lead to root rot.

Miscellaneous - As winter approaches, take time to review your past gardening year. Look at your successes and failures and make your next year's plans and goals accordingly.

If you decorate for the holidays with a cut Christmas tree, recycle the tree by pruning off boughs for use as frost and wind protection for tender and newly planted perennials and shrubs.

Prepare your garden tools for winter storage. Clean, sharpen, and store them in a bucket filled with oiled, coarse sand. They will be ready for you when spring arrives.

If you have not already done so, shut down outdoor irrigation systems to prevent freezing and drain garden hoses and store indoors.

Don't forget to feed the birds because as winter approaches, they may not be able to find an adequate supply of food. Keep fresh water out for the birds as well.

Lightly trim evergreens in your garden to use for holiday decorations. Magnolia, euonymus, boxwood, laurel, holly, cypress, and juniper all make long-lasting cut stems indoors.

Look for after Christmas sales on garden tools and equipment.

Make a wreath of dried herbs and flowers from your garden.

If you do not have a garden journal, get one and start keeping records of your garden. Record information such as future plans for design, plant and seed orders, planting schedules, insect appearances, garden highlights (like the date when you first see blooms on your spring bulbs), and more.

Celebrate the winter solstice (the arrival of winter) December 21st.

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